



HOME SECURITY TIPS

SDPD Neighborhood Policing Resource Team

April 17, 2012

CONTENTS

CONTROLLING ACCESS

Physical Protection
Deterrent Measures
Burglar Alarms
Cameras in Homes
Cameras in Multi-Family Buildings
Procedures
Things Your Burglar Won't Tell You
One Burglar's Trade Secrets

PROVIDING VISIBILITY

MAINTAINING YOUR PROPERTY

PROTECTING YOUR HOME AND PROPERTY WHEN AWAY

HELPING TO PREVENT RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

MAKING SURE THE POLICE CAN FIND YOUR HOME

IDENTIFYING YOUR PROPERTY

PREVENTING EMPLOYEE THEFT

Burglary is mostly a crime of opportunity that capitalizes on the carelessness and neglect of the homeowner or renter. This paper contains tips on preventing home burglaries, vandalism, and other property crimes by controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining your property. It also contains tips on protecting your home and property when you are away, helping to prevent residential burglaries in your neighborhood, and preventing employee theft. And if you do become a victim, it includes tips on making sure the police can find your home, and on identifying your property. These tips can significantly enhance the security of your home and property.

Additional tips on personal safety and security, vehicle security, vacation safety and security, senior safety and security, preventing crimes against businesses, preventing fraud and identity theft, reporting crime and suspicious activities, reporting suspicious activities for terrorism prevention, reporting disorder and other problems, obtaining crime information, dealing with homeless people, and starting a Neighborhood Watch program can be found in the CRIME PREVENTION AND EDUCATION section of the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police.

CONTROLLING ACCESS

The following tips suggest how access to your home, apartment, or condo can be controlled by physical protection, deterrent measures, and various procedures.

Physical Protection

- Install single cylinder dead-bolt locks on all doors. Bolts should have a minimum throw of 1 inch. Strike plates should have screws that are at least 3 inches long. Doors should be solid hardwood or metal clad. Hinges should be located on the inside or have non-removable pins. Special locks are needed on double and Dutch doors.

- Mount a steel reinforcing device on the lock side of all exterior wood door frames. It will prevent a burglar from kicking in the door. To be effective it should extend well above and below the strike plate.
- Install locking devices on all sliding glass doors and windows.
- Install good locks all doors that lead outside through garages or storage areas.
- Don't rely on chain locks for security. They're only good for privacy.
- Re-key or change all locks when moving into a new home.
- Install locks on gates, garages, sheds, etc.
- Go to a locksmith or hardware store for advice on locks.
- All locks should be resistant to "bumping"
- Use a burglar-resistant material that meets Underwriters Laboratories (UL) 972 standards in all windows and doors that a burglar might try to break through. These materials look like safety glass but will not shatter easily, even after repeated blows. The following materials can be used:
 - *Laminated glass* is made with a vinyl or plastic inter-layer sandwiched between two layers of glass. This type of glass adds additional strength to your windows. To gain entry a burglar would have to strike the glass repeatedly in the same spot in order to make a small opening. Most burglars are reluctant to create this type of noise for fear of being detected.
 - *Tempered glass* is made by placing a piece of regular glass in an oven, bringing it almost to the melting point, and then chilling it rapidly. This causes a skin to form around the glass. Fully tempered glass is four to five times stronger than regular glass.
 - *Wired glass* adds the benefit of a visible deterrent. Extra effort will be needed to break the glass and then cut through the wire located within the glass in order to gain entry.
 - *Plastic acrylics* are more than ten times stronger than glass of the same thickness and are commonly called Plexiglas.
 - *Polycarbonate* sheets are superior to acrylics and are advertised as 250 times more impact resistant than safety glass, and 20 more times than other transparent plastic.
 - *Glass with a security film attached to the inside* can also be burglar-resistant. It requires repeated blows to break through, which take time and make noise. A burglar faced with this task might give up and go away or look for another way or place to break in.
- Consider installing security bars on side, rear, or other windows that a burglar might break to enter your home. Bars must comply with Fire Code requirements for inside release to permit an occupant to escape in the event of a fire.
- Fence in the yard.
- Install a good side-yard gate and keep it locked at all times. Side and back entries are the most common access points for burglars. The gates and adjacent fencing should be at least 6 feet high. Gates made of solid wood should have a shielded (shrouded-shackle) padlock that cannot be cut with bolt cutters. Wrought-iron gates that are opened on the inside by a lever arm or knob should have shields on the gates and the adjacent fencing that prevent a person from reaching in to open them. These shields can be solid plastic or metal, or open metal mesh. Gates with lever arms should also have a cylindrical shield around the arm that prevents a person from opening the gate by inserting anything through, over, or under the gate that can be used to rotate the arm, e.g., a thin wire with a hook at one end. Gates with beveled latches should also have a latch guard to prevent a person from inserting a thin piece of metal or anything else between the frame and the gate to push in the latch. The guard should be centered on the latch and extend at least 6 inches above and below it. A deadbolt lock with a cylindrical latch would not have this problem, nor would a gate with a shielded padlock.
- Plant bushes with thorns or prickly leaves near windows and along fences.
- Trim trees so that limbs don't provide access to roofs, second stories, etc.
- Call the SDPD Community Relations Officer (CRO) in your neighborhood to arrange for a free home security survey. SDPD division addresses and phone numbers are listed at the end of this paper.

Deterrent Measures

- Put Neighborhood Watch, alarm company, and Operation ID stickers on entry doors and windows.
- Consider having a dog that can scare a stranger away by either barking or looking fierce. Keep an outside dog in a fenced area and have a good lock on the gate.
- Use fencing, gates, landscaping, pavement treatment, signs, etc. to define clear boundaries between your property and adjoining properties.

Burglar Alarms

- Alarm systems usually include one or more of the following components: photocell or magnetic contacts on doors and windows, heat or motion detectors in interior spaces, glass break detectors, keypads with a means of checking the status of the system, and audible alarms. All equipment should be UUL certified.
- Multiple sensors are preferred because they reduce false alarms, which are wasteful of police resources and lead to fines and permit revocation.
- See Secs. 33.3701-33.3723 of the San Diego Municipal Code for burglary alarm business and agent requirements and responsibilities, alarm-user permit requirements, etc. Call SDPD Permits and Licensing at **(619) 531-2250** about obtaining an alarm permit.
- Get alarm company references from your insurance agent, family members, friends, or neighbors. Get at least three estimates in writing. The SDPD does not prefer or recommend companies, brands, or types of security systems.
- Make sure the alarm company has a City Business Tax Certificate and is licensed by the State of California. You can verify the latter by calling the State of California Bureau of Security and Investigative Services at **(916) 322-4000** or going online at <http://www.dca.ca.gov/bsis>.
- See if the company is a member of the Electronic Security Association (ESA). Go to its website at www.alarm.org and under Consumers, click on Looking for an Alarm Dealer and then click on California to get a list of member companies. The ESA has adopted a strict code of ethics that addresses consumer concerns and provides a process for consumer complaints. You can read this code in its website as well as helpful tips for choosing an alarm company.
- Call the Better Business Bureau (BBB) of San Diego County at **(858) 496-2131** to check on any unsolicited offers. Or visit its website at www.sandiego.bbb.org to see whether the business is accredited. And for any business, you can check its rating, reason for the rating, and the number of closed complaints in five categories. Its website also has general consumer information and tips on avoiding various types of fraud.
- If your system is monitored, make sure the monitoring station is open 24/7 and has backup power. The company's customer service department should also be open 24/7.
- Make sure you understand your service contract, all the points of protection and the equipment to be installed, the initial and monthly payments, and the warranty period.
- Inform your insurance company. You may qualify for a discount.
- The system should also have a fail-safe battery backup. Check the batteries periodically and replace them if necessary.
- Post an alarm company sign on your property and put stickers on ground-level doors and windows.
- Beware of door-to-door sales people. Dishonest ones may do one or more of the following:
 - Use high-pressure sales tactics to coerce a sale
 - Say the offer is only good today
 - Not provide the terms and conditions of the sale in writing
 - Say that the police will not respond to older alarm systems
 - Imply that he or she is from the home owner's current company
 - Offer free system upgrades
 - Offer a discount for placing the alarm company sign on your property

Cameras in Homes

Burglars may be deterred from breaking into your home if they know that their actions will be recorded on a camera system. And if they do break in and camera imagery is available to the alarm company, the police response may be faster and the burglars caught before they can escape. Systems that once cost thousands of dollars now cost hundreds of dollars and are relatively easy to install. For example, a homeowner can now buy four cameras and a four-channel DVR for as low as \$300. A basic four-camera system could cover the approaches to your home from the street and the doors and windows a burglar might break in through. Signs should simply state that "cameras are on the premises" or "surveillance is in progress."

Cameras can be wired or wireless. Imagery can be recorded at specific times, when motion is detected, or when an alarm is triggered. And it can be viewed on a home or remote monitor, laptop, or on a mobile phone. Any system that is installed should be able to provide high-quality, digital imagery of suspicious persons and activities for use by the SDPD in investigating crimes.

Cameras in Multi-Family Buildings

Cameras are usually used just to record persons and activities in their fields of view. They can record continually or only when motion is detected. After a crime occurs the imagery can be reviewed for usable evidence. The existence of these cameras helps to deter crime but not to stop a crime in progress.

Video analytics or intelligent video software is now available to monitor multiple cameras for unusual or suspicious activity as it is occurring. The software will alert personnel who have monitors, but would not be watching them all the time, that a parameter or alarm condition has occurred. The monitors could be located on the premises or at a security company office. In the latter case an Internet link would have to be provided to transmit the imagery. The SDPD would then be called if a crime in progress is observed. Officers might even arrive in time to catch the perpetrators. And in some cases the imagery could be transmitted directly to the SDPD to decide whether to dispatch officers.

Alarm conditions can be set for day of the week and time of the day. They include the following:

- Motion in and out of an area
- Non-motion, e.g., unattended package or illegal parking
- Items that have moved or are missing
- Behavior, e.g., loitering, casing, or tailgating
- Numbers of people, vehicles, or other objects in the area
- Overcrowding, where numbers exceed a set threshold

For example, the software can be programmed to alert personnel with monitors when someone enters an area that is supposed to be unoccupied. Lights could be turned on when motion is detected at night. And directional speakers could be installed to warn the trespassers with an audio announcement that the police will be called if they do not leave the property immediately.

Whatever camera system is installed should be designed to provide high-quality, digital imagery of suspicious persons and activities for use by the SDPD in investigating crimes.

Procedures

- Keep all doors and windows locked, even if you are just going out “for a minute.” If a window is left open a few inches for ventilation, pins or dowels should be inserted in the tracks to prevent someone from opening it more.
- Lock gates, garages, and sheds after each use.
- Store bicycles, mowers, ladders, etc. in a locked garage or shed, or secure them to some stationary point.
- Don’t leave notes on your door when you are away from home.
- Don’t leave keys in mailboxes or planters, under doormats, or in other obvious hiding spots. Leave an extra key with a neighbor.
- Know who’s at your door before opening it. Check photo registration card before dealing with any solicitors, peddlers, interviewers, etc. These persons are required to obtain a card from the SDPD and display it on the front of their clothing. They are allowed to solicit only between 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. except by appointment.
- Be suspicious of persons making unsolicited offers of services.
- Post a NO SOLICITING sign if you don’t want any solicitor to ring your door bell, knock on your door, or make any other sound to attract your attention.
- Ask for photo identification before letting in anyone you don’t know. Check out the identification with the company or agency if you are suspicious.
- Never let a stranger enter your home to use the telephone. Offer to make the call yourself in an emergency.
- Don’t give your name, phone number, or whereabouts on your answering machine message. Never say you aren’t home. Just ask the caller to leave a message.

- Don't leave your home keys on a chain with your vehicle keys when you use valet parking. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible. Keep your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where a criminal is not likely to find them.
- Don't give maids, babysitters, or others working in your home access to your home keys or alarm codes.
- Call **911** if you are at home and think someone might be breaking in.
- Don't take direct action yourself. An officer will be dispatched to your address even if you cannot speak or hang up.
- Don't go in or call out if you return home and suspect someone has broken into your home, e.g., if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call the police.
- Don't discuss your assets or finances with strangers.
- Don't keep large sums of money at home.
- Keep valuable papers, stocks, bonds, expensive jewelry, coin collections, etc. in a bank safe deposit box. Don't store them at home unless you have a security closet or a safe that is well hidden and cannot be removed.
- Take the following additional measures to protect your valuables when staging an open house. Secure prescription medicines like other valuables. Have everybody entering your house show a photo ID and sign a registration sheet. Don't let anyone in unless he or she is accompanied by an agent and tell the agent not to let his or her clients out of sight at any time.

Things Your Burglar Won't Tell You

Here are some additional tips from interviews with convicted burglars.

- Of course I look familiar, I was here just last week cleaning your carpets, painting your shutters, or delivering your new TV.
- Thanks for letting me use the bathroom when I was working in your yard last week. While I was in there I unlatched the back window to make my return a little easier.
- Those nice yard toys your kids leave out make me wonder what type of gaming system they have.
- I might leave a pizza flyer in your front door to see how long it takes you to remove it.
- If glass is part of your front entrance, don't let your alarm company install the control pad where I can see if the alarm is set.
- If you don't alarm your windows, install motion detectors in the rooms I might enter, including the master bedroom where you usually keep your jewelry and home safe.
- Don't forget to lock your doors and turn on your alarm when you go out in bad weather. I work on those days too.
- I don't understand why you would you pay all that money for a fancy alarm system and leave your house without setting it.
- I always knock first. If you answer, I'll ask for directions or offer to clean your windows. But don't open the door or take me up on it. If you don't answer I'll try the door. Occasionally I hit the jackpot and walk right in.
- Do you really think I won't look in your sock drawer? I always check dresser drawers, the bedside table, and the medicine cabinet. But I almost never go into kids' rooms.
- I won't have enough time to break into that safe where you keep your valuables. But I'll take it with me if it's not bolted down.
- A loud TV or radio can be a better deterrent than the best alarm system. If you don't want to leave one on while you're out of town, use a timer that turns it on when you usually watch or listen to it.
- Sometimes I carry a clipboard. Sometimes I dress like a lawn guy. I do my best not to look like a burglar.
- The two things I hate most are loud dogs and nosy neighbors.
- I'll break a window to get in even if it makes a little noise. If your neighbor hears a loud sound he'll stop what he's doing and wait to hear it again. If he doesn't hear it again he'll just go back to what he was doing. It's human nature.
- I love looking in your windows. I'm looking for signs that you're home and for flat screen TVs or gaming systems I'd like. I'll drive or walk through your neighborhood at night before you close the blinds just to pick my targets.
- A window open a little to let in a little fresh air during the day is an invitation for me to come in. If you do that put something in the track that prevents someone from opening it wide enough to get through.

One Burglar's Trade Secrets

This burglar broke into over 70 homes in England, never forced an entry, and was only caught by DNA evidence. He said he avoided homes with any of the following:

- A dog or sign warning of a dog
- Burglar alarm
- Cameras
- Lights on inside
- Lights outside on motion detectors
- Barbed wire on fences and gates
- Anti-climb paint on fences and walls

PROVIDING VISIBILITY

- Leave outside lights on after dark or have outside lights controlled by a motion detector. Make sure there are no dark areas around the house, garage, or yard in which a person could hide. Street lights are generally inadequate for illuminating your property.
- Check lights regularly and replace burnt out bulbs.
- Trim bushes to less than 3 feet to eliminate possible hiding places, especially near windows and sidewalks.
- Trim tree canopies to at least 8 feet to allow visibility into your property.
- Replace solid walls in front yards with open fencing to eliminate hiding places and make climbing more difficult.
- Install a wide-angle peephole in your front door so you can look out without being seen yourself.

MAINTAINING YOUR PROPERTY

- Keep property in good condition and free of trash, litter, weeds, leaves, graffiti, dismantled or inoperative vehicles, and other things that indicate neglect in caring for your property.
- Replace broken windows or screens.
- Repair broken fences and gate locks.
- Use screens, wired glass, or other protection for light fixtures and bulbs.
- Remove loose rocks and other objects that could be used to vandalize your property.

PROTECTING YOUR HOME AND PROPERTY WHEN AWAY

- Lock all doors and windows. Use deadbolts, dowels, or locking pins in sliding glass doors and windows to keep them from being pried open.
- Never announce your vacation plans on Facebook, My Space, Twitter, or other social networking sites.
- Use timers on lights, radios, TVs, etc. to make them go on and off during the day and night to make your home appear occupied.
- Stop mail and newspaper delivery, or have neighbor pick up anything left at the home.
- Keep grass watered and cut. Water and trim other landscaping.
- Ask the neighbors to watch your home and report any suspicious activities.
- Leave your itinerary with a neighbor so you can be contacted in an emergency.
- Disconnect your electric garage door opener and padlock the door, preferably on the inside.
- Visit your local SDPD Area Station to request vacation home checks when you'll be out of town.
- Set your burglar alarm and notify your alarm company that you will be away. Then if an alarm occurs when you are away the company will not call your home first to verify the alarm; it will notify the police directly. Also provide the alarm company with an up-to-date list of persons to contact about the alarm and the need to secure your home after a burglary.

HELPING TO PREVENT RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

The tips in this section apply to apartment and condo communities as well as neighborhoods. First, learn the following:

- Who belongs in your neighborhood, i.e., residents, children, friends, workers, guests, etc.
- What vehicles your neighbors drive
- When your neighbors are usually away from home
- When your neighbors are away on vacation
- When dogs usually bark
- When meter readers usually come

You can help stop a burglary in progress by promptly calling **911** if you see a person doing the following:

- Ringing the front door bell, trying to open the door, and then going into the side or back yard
- Entering a neighbor's home when the neighbor is away
- Forcing an entry of a home
- Removing property from a home, especially if the residents are away
- A neighbor screaming or calling for help

You can help prevent a burglary by promptly calling **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**, the SDPD non-emergency numbers, to report anything suspicious in your neighborhood. Examples of suspicious activities can be found on the page entitled *Reporting and Providing Information about Crimes and Suspicious Activities* on the SDPD website at **www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/community/index.shtml**. They include the following:

- The sound of breaking glass, an alarm, or a barking dog in a neighbor's home when the neighbor is away
- A person soliciting without a license, not displaying a valid registration card, or operating between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.
- Going door-to-door on your street
- A person loitering in the near a home, especially if the residents are away
- A person sitting in a parked vehicle
- A vehicle circling your block

If you have any information that might help solve a burglary and lead to the arrest of the burglar, call your local SDPD Area Station and ask to speak to the detective handling the case. Or you can call Crime Stoppers at its 24-hour hotline at **(888) 580-8477** and provide information anonymously. The operator on this will take your information and give you a code number. If your information leads to an arrest you could earn a reward of up to \$1,000. The operator will explain how you can use your code number to give additional information and how to collect your reward. You can also provide information by e-mailing from **www.tipsubmit.com** or by text messaging from a cell phone to **CRIMES** or **274637**, with **Tips409** at the beginning of the message. Crime Stoppers is a citizen-operated, non-profit organization that works in partnership with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to help solve serious crimes. It gives community members an opportunity to fight crime without "getting involved."

MAKING SURE THE POLICE CAN FIND YOUR HOME

- Make sure your street address number is clearly visible from the street and is well lighted at night so the police and other emergency personnel can locate your home easily. Numbers should be at least 4 inches high must be used on individual dwellings and duplexes, and 12 inches high on multiple-unit residential buildings.
- Make sure your unit number (in a multifamily housing development) is clearly visible from paths in the development. A directory or map that shows paths and unit locations should be placed at the main entrance of the development.
- Provide the police with an entry code if you live in a gated community.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PROPERTY

- Etch your driver's license number on any valuables that might be stolen.
- Photograph valuables that cannot be etched.
- Keep a detailed, up-to-date record of your valuables. Include type, model, serial number, proof of purchase, and fair market value.

PREVENTING EMPLOYEE THEFT

Despite your best efforts, dishonest employees can usually find ways to steal. If you suspect theft, call the SDPD at **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. Don't play detective and try to solve the crime. And don't jump to unwarranted conclusions. A false accusation could result in serious civil liability.

Conduct a thorough background check before hiring a housekeeper, nanny, or other person who works regularly in your home. Consider using an outside company to collect information. Checks should be made for criminal arrests and convictions, outstanding warrants, bankruptcies, credit problems, civil judgments, citizenship, etc. And past employment should be verified. Some checks should be made annually.

In selecting a contractor to work in or outside your home you should check its references and make sure it is insured and bonded. Insurance will protect you from damage caused by the contractor's employees. A surety bond will guarantee that the work will be performed as stated in the contract. For some contractors you can require a bond that will cover theft or other losses resulting from dishonest acts committed by an employee acting alone or in collusion with other persons. Some bonds require that the employee be prosecuted and convicted of the crime. Others require evidence of employee dishonesty. The conditions for coverage would be negotiated in drafting the bond.

You should also check that the contractor is licensed to work in the City of San Diego, i.e., that it has a Business Tax Certificate. This can be done by looking in the business listings on the City's website at <http://www.sandiego.gov/treasurer/taxesfees/btax/nblactive.shtml>. Construction contractors should be licensed by the State of California. You can check the status of a contractor's license on the Contractors State License Board's website at www.cslb.ca.gov/default.asp.

You can also require that the contractor conduct a background investigation on each employee that will work at your home. For this you will need to specify the following: (1) information an employee will have to provide, e.g., personal history, references, fingerprints, etc., (2) kinds of checks to be made, e.g., employee's name and SSN, criminal history, DMV record, credit record, civil action history, etc., and (3) criteria for passing each check, e.g., no criminal convictions or outstanding warrants, no bankruptcies, no civil judgments, etc. The contractor should also be prohibited from substituting a cleared employee with one that is not cleared, or subcontracting any of the services.

The opportunities for employee theft can be reduced by having the contract work done when you are home. This is the best option. Otherwise you'll have to give the contractor's employees means to enter your home when you are away, i.e., keys, door codes, or individual access cards, as well as the codes to any alarm systems that are installed. And the employee will have to lock all doors and turn on the alarm(s) when he or she leaves.

SDPD AREA STATIONS

| | | |
|--------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Central | 2501 Imperial Ave. SD 92102 | (619) 744-9500 |
| Eastern | 9225 Aero Dr. SD 92123 | (858) 495-7900 |
| Mid-City | 4310 Landis St. SD 92105 | (619) 516-3000 |
| Northeastern | 13396 Salmon River Rd. SD 92129 | (858) 538-8000 |
| Northern | 4275 Eastgate Mall SD 92037 | (858) 552-1700 |
| Northwestern | 12592 El Camino Real SD 92130 | (858) 523-7000 |
| Southeastern | 7222 Skyline Dr. SD 92114 | (619) 527-3500 |
| Southern | 1120 27th St. SD 92154 | (619) 424-0400 |
| Western | 5215 Gaines St. SD 92110 | (619) 692-4800 |